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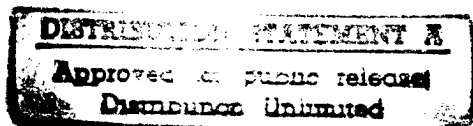
**OPERATIONAL ART: AN ANALYSIS OF BRITAIN'S
SOUTHWEST ASIA CAMPAIGN IN WORLD WAR I**

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.



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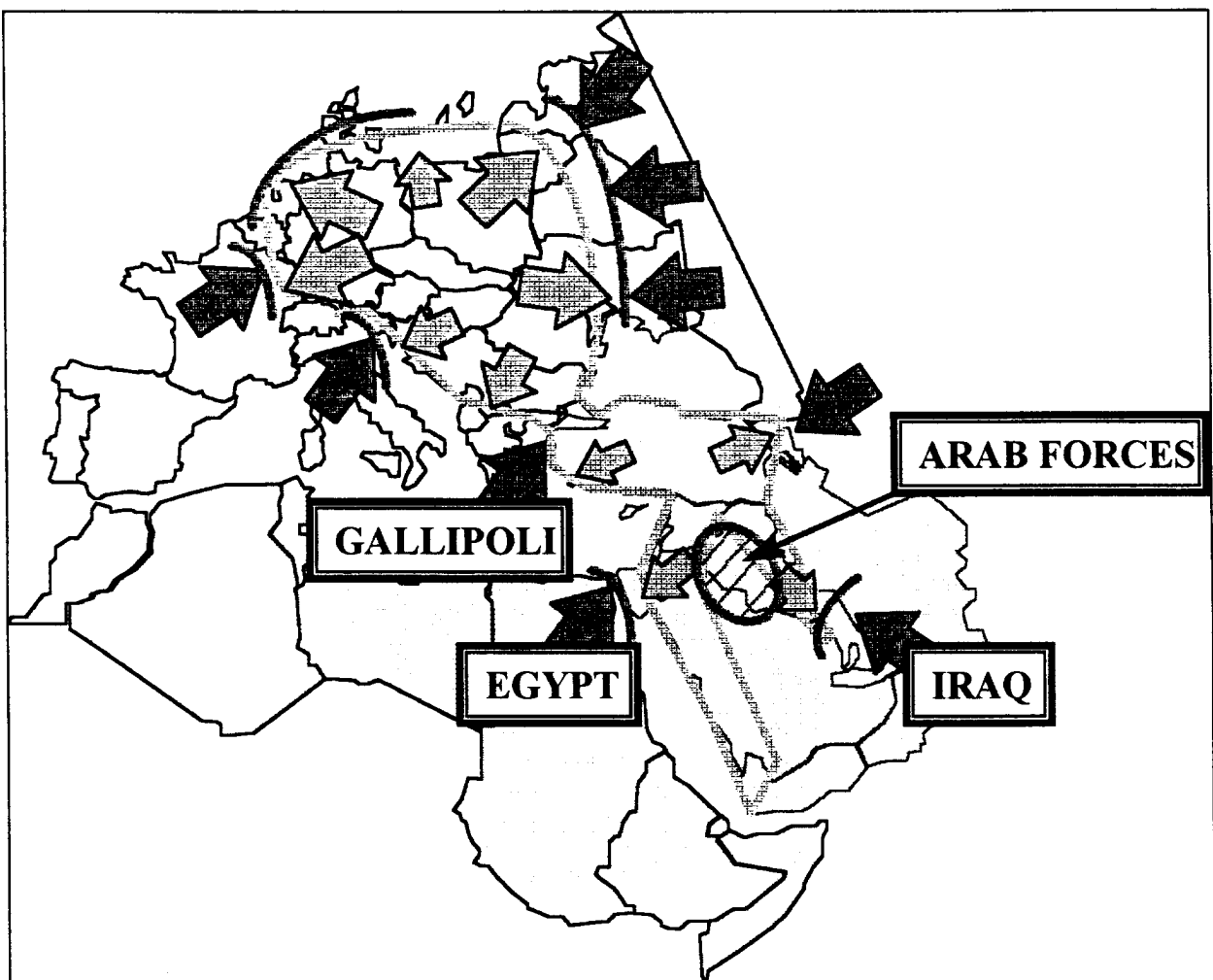
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ABSTRACT

Although there exist a wide variety of opinions on why Britain chose to commit assets to the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions, it is most probable that Britain viewed Russia's capitulation as a serious threat to the western front--it would severely affect the balance of power in the west, giving Germany the opportunity to break the stalemate that existed there. With this in mind, Britain launched four operations in the Southwest Asia theater (Egypt (Suez), Gallipoli, Arabia, and Mesopotamia) to relieve the pressure on the eastern front and to protect vital interests in the regions.

Britain's concept of opening a southern front to threaten Germany was potentially sound. With successes in the south, it would have been possible for the allies to avoid the massive amounts of casualties that were resulting from the war of attrition on the western front. But the southwest Asian campaign was marred by disastrous results in major operations that did not serve, directly or indirectly, either the national or theater strategic objectives. Further analysis of operational art principles will explain why Britain failed in this campaign and allow us to view an operational scheme that might better have served Britain and her allies.



INTRODUCTION: Simplifying the perspective of the Southwest Asian Campaign.

Socrates: And the country which was enough to support the original inhabitants will be too small now, and not enough?

Glaucon: Quite true.

S: Then a slice of our neighbours' land will be wanted by us for pasture and tillage, and they will want a slice of ours, if, like ourselves, they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth?

G: That, Socrates, will be inevitable.

S: And so we shall go to war, Glaucon. Shall we not?¹

Assuming that conflict between nations results from the desire for “more,” and that resolution of this conflict ranges from diplomacy (peaceful leverage) to deterrence (peaceful threat) to limited war (forceful leverage) to total war (escalation of hostilities), then we can say that war results from a nation’s search to maintain or increase their health and well-being (economically, physically, morally, etc.), or for want of a better word, their “prosperity.” In a *Proceedings* article by RADM Brown, “The Principles of War,” he states that “in the First World War...[the] national objective was the overthrow of the enemy’s government.”² He is incorrect. What he calls the “primary objective” is subordinate to the actual national objective of maintaining, or increasing, that country’s prosperity. In this context, Britain was dedicated in WWI to the elimination of threats to its prosperity that were posed by the German nation’s military. Specifically, Britain’s objectives on 4 August, 1914, resembled the following:

1. National objective: maintain British prosperity.
2. National strategic objective: militarily eliminate the threat posed by the German military.
3. Western theater strategic objective: defeat German forces on the western front in order to defeat Germany.
4. Western theater operational objective: defeat German 1st through 6th armies along western front.³
5. Southwest Asian theater strategic objective: defeat axis forces in the south in order to threaten Germany from the south.
6. Southwest Asian theater operational objective: capture the Dardanelles to establish an immediate threat to the southern borders of Germany and reopen the SLOC to Russia for their resupply.⁴

¹ Plato, THE REPUBLIC, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Washington Square Press, 1950), p.114.

² RADM C.R. Brown, USN, “The Principles of War,” Proceedings, Vol. 75, No. 6, June 1949, p. 625.

³ Charles A. King, ed., Harper’s Pictorial Library of the World: Vol. III, Battles, Sieges, and Campaigns (Harper and Brothers, 1920), p. 7.

⁴ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), pp. 24-25.

The objective listed in number six is the central focus of this paper. For, incredibly, Britain embarked on four major operations (Gallipoli, Egypt, Iraq, and Arabia) in its southwest Asian campaign without an established plan. This omission led to a lack of synchronization between the major operations that, in turn, failed to provide Britain with advantages in strength at critical points in its overall campaign. Lack of a campaign plan also resulted in a lack of proper sequencing (that is, ordering the major operations to maximize the impact of each successive event) that eventually led to Britain's failure to overcome the enemy's center of gravity within the theater and extended the period required to successfully achieve each of the operations' intended objectives. Lastly, the lack of a campaign plan led to Britain's failure to preserve focus on the theater *schwerpunkt*, or point of critical emphasis.⁵

Each of the four major operations enjoyed individual successes and failures in a variety of operational art elements. The following sections will give a brief overview of each operation, discuss their successes and failures together with the corresponding impacts on operational art elements and, finally, summarize the main points discussed. The final section will include a sample campaign plan that might better have served Britain and her allies.

OVERVIEW: World War I in a nutshell.

The Serbian assassination of Archduke Ferdinand gave Austria and Germany an opportunity to pursue their national agendas in search of "more"—Austria, a victim of terrorism for many years, wanted once and for all to eliminate the origins of this threat. Germany, faced with a Russian mobilization in the east and a French mobilization in the west, felt obligated to eliminate the threat posed by these poised forces through preemptive strikes.

⁵ Milan Vego, Fundamentals of Operational Design (NWC 4104, August 1996), p. 13.

Peaceful diplomatic efforts failed to end the conflict due to the costs involved—no nation was willing to yield an unanswered loss to its prosperity.

Britain, watching a powerful German military force threaten France and Russia, perceived a threat to the health and well-being of their island nation. British leaders first attempted to eliminate the German threat through diplomatic means, but were unsuccessful. Germany's invasion of Belgium motivated the British populace, whose will to fight had previously been lagging, and provided Britain's leadership with the opportunity to move militarily against Germany. With France barely holding the western front, Britain provided five divisions there in an attempt to preserve an element of space that could, if necessary, be traded for time—time Britain could use to better prepare for the defense of the home isles.

On the eastern front, German victories threatened Russia. Britain, with limited military assets available, chose to commit assets to the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions to relieve the pressure on Russia: Britain viewed Russia's possible capitulation (due to horrendous losses—over a million men in a few short months) as a serious threat to the western front--those German divisions committed in the east would be available for reassignment in the west. This would severely affect the tenuous balance of power in the west, giving Germany the opportunity to break the stalemate that existed there.

British leaders, with their military locked in a stalemate in France, believed that opening a southern front would both relieve the pressure on the eastern front (thereby preserving the balance of power in the west) and give them an opportunity to deliver a fatal blow to Germany through their soft underbelly.⁶

⁶ Charles A. King, ed., Harper's Pictorial Library of the World: Vol. III, Battles, Sieges, and Campaigns (Harper and Brothers, 1920), p. 160.

A short discussion of WWI centers of gravity is also in order. At the national strategic level, the German army was the principle center of gravity. Against this, Britain and her allies were obligated to ensure that every national effort was directed in some manner at eliminating it. On the western front, it is clear that the allies were solely dedicated to this purpose: over two million allied casualties attest to their levels of effort. In the south, Turkey, whose leaders were shunned by Britain in the months preceding the outbreak of hostilities, turned to Germany for support and as a result their army became the center of gravity in the southern European region. Finally, on the eastern front German forces formed the center of gravity against which Russia dedicated her military.

Germany viewed the center of gravity on the western front as the French/British army, on the southwestern Asian front as the British contingent guarding the Suez canal, and on the eastern front as the Russian army. The Germans also faced the British navy, which was in itself a critical strength against which Germany had to contend (a navy was crucial to both Britain's stature as a major colonial power and Britain's requirement to fight on external lines, the defense of which depended on a strong navy).

THE SOUTHWEST ASIAN CAMPAIGN: an overall analysis.

Britain's strategic efforts in WWI, described by one historian as Britain's four-year muddle, was reflected in Britain's strategic and operational wandering in their southwest Asian campaign.⁷ Although Britain correctly identified the theater objective (the Dardanelles) prior to commencement of hostilities in the southern theater, they failed to maintain this focus

⁷ A.J. Barker, The Bastard War (Dial Press, 1967), p. vii.

following their failure at Gallipoli, shifting instead to the protection of important assets (Iraqi oil and the Suez Canal) in the southwest Asian region from Turkish forces in those locations.

From a review of historical accounts of the period, it is clear that the operational objective changed according to the perspective of the British leaders in different regions. For instance, the British War Council in London was simply concerned with providing a demonstration (per the request of Nicholas of Russia) to alleviate pressure on Russian troops in the Black Sea region.⁸ Yet Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, listed the objective of opening the Dardanelles as a means to resume grain shipments from Russia to Britain and France in return for shipments of ammunition.⁹ Another, an historian writing shortly after the war, listed operations in the Dardanelles as a diversion to lessen pressure on British troops in Egypt and Russian troops in the Caucasus.¹⁰

Even today the British objective in the southern theater is unclear. As discussed in the next few paragraphs, campaign plans are built around a stated objective. Without such an objective, Britain could not formulate a solid campaign plan. And without a campaign plan, Britain simply wasted time, space, and forces in a disjointed mix of uncoordinated operations pursuing objectives that had no impact on the overall outcome of the war.

Correctly formulated, a campaign is a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war.¹¹ A campaign plan orients [forces against] the enemy's

⁸ Schmitt and Vedeler, World in the Crucible 1914-1919 (Harper Torchbooks, 1984), p. 105.

⁹ Charles A. King, ed., Harper's Pictorial Library of the World: Vol. III, Battles, Sieges, and Campaigns (Harper and Brothers, 1920), p. 161.

¹⁰ Charles A. King, ed., Harper's Pictorial Library of the World: Vol. III, Battles, Sieges, and Campaigns (Harper and Brothers, 1920), p. 161.

¹¹ U.S. Army, Field Manual 100-1, p. 13.

center of gravity in order to make his position in the theater disadvantageous, rob him of the initiative or his will to continue the fight, and defeat him.¹² The seven tenets of a campaign plan are:

1. Provides a broad concept of operations...to achieve strategic military objectives...and clearly defines...success.
2. Provides an orderly schedule of strategic military decisions...
3. Orients on the enemy's center of gravity.
4. Phases a series of related major operations.
5. Composes subordinate forces and designates command relationships.
6. Provides operational direction and tasks to subordinates.
7. Synchronizes...land and sea efforts into a cohesive and synergistic whole...¹³

The initial idea for Britain's southwest Asian campaign was drafted in the form of a paper by LtCol Hankey, the Secretary of Britain's War Council:

...Hankey suggested that it was time to consider whether [the stalemate on the western front] might not be broken by making some broad flanking movement around the line—perhaps through Turkey or the Balkans.¹⁴

Lord Fisher, Britain's First Sea Lord, fully supported this idea and drafted a plan that he felt "should be implemented immediately."

All the Indians and 75,000 of the British troops in France were to be embarked at Marseilles and landed, together with the Egyptian garrison, on the Asiatic side of the Dardanelles; the Greeks were to attack the Gallipoli peninsula, and the Bulgarians to march to Constantinople. At the same time a squadron of old British battleships of the *Majestic* and *Canopus* class were to force the Dardanelles.¹⁵

Although this plan was fairly straightforward, it better resembled an operational plan than a campaign plan. This was especially apparent when measured against the seven tenets of a campaign: while Lord Fisher's plan did provide a broad concept of operations oriented around the enemy's center of gravity, it did not contain an orderly schedule of military

¹² Mendel and Banks, "Campaign Planning: Getting It Straight", Parameters, September 1988 (NWC 4118), p. 46.

¹³ Mendel and Banks, "Campaign Planning: Getting It Straight", Parameters, September 1988 (NWC 4118), p. 46.

¹⁴ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 24.

¹⁵ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 24-25.

decisions, it did not phase a series of related major operations, it did not designate command relationships or compose subordinate forces, it did not provide tasks or operational direction to subordinates, and while it mentioned land and sea forces, it did not synchronize them into a cohesive and synergistic whole.

While adoption of Lord Fisher's plan would have provided Britain with an objective with which to focus their efforts, political influences were to wreck the plan before it got off the ground. Russia, due to historic national differences, would not accept Grecian control of even a portion of the Dardanelles. Bulgaria wavered back and forth in support of German and allied forces and remained unmotivated to provide a military force to attack Constantinople. And Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of War, stated that he "could not spare a man for any new expedition, and there was certainly no question of taking troops from France; if there was to be any demonstration at all [in the Dardanelles] it would have to be a naval affair."¹⁶

Britain's failure to complete a campaign plan led them initially to rely on a flawed operational plan that called for a naval force, acting alone, to force the Dardanelles. At the same time, Britain embarked on other major operations in Iraq and Egypt that diluted their main effort in the Dardanelles. This had a disastrous effect on the outcome of their efforts in southwest Asia; although Britain succeeded in opening a split southern front near Egypt and in Iraq, they fell short of their objective of opening a southern front to threaten Germany.

GALLIPOLI: the first major southwest Asian operation.

The tenuous civil situation in Turkey was held together by the unpopular government of the Young Turks, and the collapse of Constantinople would have signaled the *de facto*

¹⁶ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 25.

capitulation of the Turkish military dispersed throughout the region.¹⁷ Potentially, the capture of Gallipoli would have provided strong support for Britain's strategic objective of militarily eliminating the German army:

"...the War Council reached a provisional decision on January 13 that the admiralty should prepare for a naval expedition in February [1915] to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula, with Constantinople as its objective."¹⁸

But a compendium of disasters, beginning with the initial plan, ensured the failure of the major operation at Gallipoli. In the first phase, the mighty British fleet was ordered to sail from the Mediterranean Sea, through the Dardanelles (through minefields and gunfire from numerous forts along the straits), and into the Black Sea. But it could do little to conquer an army, and the fleet eventually sailed away after numerous ships had been lost.¹⁹ This lack of success was viewed by Turkish forces as a victory over the greatest fleet in the world, and this "victory" resulted in a two fold advantage for the Turkish military: first, Britain's naval attack heralded the intentions of the British forces on the Dardanelles, and second, the fleet's "loss" provided a significant boost to the sagging morale of the Turkish military.²⁰

The second phase of the Gallipoli operation correctly included land forces. But, through poor operations security, Turkey was able to follow every step of preparation for an amphibious landing. Turkish intelligence personnel watched British personnel buy large numbers of lighters and small craft in ports close to the area of operations. They also read the newspapers, which ran articles on the status of the preparations. Poor deceptive efforts,

¹⁷ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 30.

¹⁸ Schmitt and Vedeler, World in the Crucible 1914-1919 (Harper Torchbooks, 1984), p. 105.

¹⁹ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 29.

²⁰ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 82.

which portrayed an overall lack of desire to bring overwhelming forces to bear in a surprise attack on a decisive point, is an indicator too of Britain's rush to engage the "ill-equipped" Turks at the expense of important operational considerations.

Upon landing at Gallipoli, the British forces failed to seize the high ground—a tactical omission that had severe operational consequences. As time progressed, the British passed their culminating point (if one believes that it is possible to power through the culminating point and, with enough additional assets, achieve victory) and continued to feed tens of thousands of fresh troops into the meatgrinder ashore (over 489,000 troops ended up in the Gallipoli operation, of which at least 252,000 became casualties).²¹

Had this large mass of forces been applied at the outset, the outcome of this major operation would have been much different. Lord Kitchener, who could not afford the release of even 30,000 men from the western front at the beginning of the operation, was surely impacted by the eventual expense of 489,000 within the year. The strategic decisions made by Britain's War Council in London (their highest leaders) critically impacted success of the Gallipoli operation: the Dardanelles commission, established in 1917 to investigate the failure of this major operation, "was struck by the vagueness and want of precision which seems to have characterized the proceedings of the War Council."²²

Overlooking the tactical mistakes and failures, a summary of the operational art elements critical to this operation includes:

Strategically,

-The lack of unity of command and unity of effort resulted in a misapplication of forces (the land forces should have been applied in the first phase).

²¹ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 336.

²² Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 29.

-The critical omission of proper synchronization and sequencing with attacks in other regions allowed the Turkish military to focus a mass of forces in defense of the Dardanelles and allowed the Turks to successfully defend the straits.

Operationally,

-The costs (especially in terms of personnel and time) were unacceptably high.

-Elements of maneuver that were included in the landing operation exhausted themselves in the early phases and were never successfully resurrected.

EFFORTS IN MESOPOTAMIA: the second major southwest Asian operation.

Smaller British efforts in the region referred to as Mesopotamia indirectly supported Britain's national objective by securing oil for Britain's military machine and tying up Turkish forces a great distance from the campaign's decisive point (the Dardanelles). Originally, the Mesopotamian operational objective was to seize and secure Abadan (near Basra) and its oil resources that were earmarked for the British fleet.²³ As such, this operation supported the nation's strategic objective as well as the theater strategic objective. But it deviated from the original plan and became an *ad hoc* operation.

The British commander, General Barrett, leading a reinforced division of the Indian troops originally included in Britain's "campaign plan" (drafted but not followed) for use in the Gallipoli operation, interpreted his mission as being a bit more expansive: if Basra was taken, Abadan would be more secure, if Qurna was taken, Basra would be more secure, etc., etc., until he surmised that if he leapfrogged from city to city all the way to Baghdad, then the whole region would be more secure.

The British forces therefore embarked on a series of operations with insufficient troops for the large amount of space they intended to control. Basra fell to the British in November

²³ A.J. Barker, The Bastard War (Dial Press, 1967), p. 27.

1914; Qurna fell in December 1914; the British fought off Turkish counter-attacks in Qurna from December through July 1915 and then moved into Nasiryeh in July 1915, conquering Amara. Kut fell to the British in September 1915, and they pushed to within 18 miles of Baghdad.

As British forces neared Baghdad, Turkish leaders dispatched three additional divisions to the area. These divisions, led by a Turkish commander who swung the tide at Gallipoli to the Turks, succeeded in routing the British, who retreated to Kut and established defensive positions there.²⁴ Surrounded by over thirty thousand Turks, the relatively small force of nine thousand British troops managed to hold their positions in Kut from December through May 1916. Then, exhausting their food and ammunition supplies, the British surrendered. Although suffering a setback because of this loss, additional British forces were sent to the area and they eventually routed the Turks, capturing Baghdad in March, 1917.

Once again, if we overlook the tactical mistakes and failures we can focus on a summary of the operational art elements critical to this operation:

Strategically,

- Synchronization with other major operations was exceedingly poor. Any effort in this region should have been formulated to draw Turkish forces from the Dardanelles prior to a major operation there.

- Because this operation was not sequenced to deplete Turkish forces from Gallipoli in preparation for an operation there, the risks involved in accepting expanded objectives in Mesopotamia did not justify either the costs in forces or the time spent on the conquest for Baghdad.

- British leaders misplaced the objective. The British front that was opened in this operation did nothing to further Britain's war aims with respect to Germany.

Operationally,

- The time involved in the move from Basra to their final victory in Baghdad was measured in years and required many more forces than their original plan to defend Abadan called for. These forces would have been better utilized on other fronts.

²⁴ A.J. Barker, The Bastard War (Dial Press, 1967), pp. 1-340.

-Disregard for the initial guidance in Mesopotamia resulted in an unnecessary expansion of the British mission (a phenomenon known today as "mission creep"). This increased the threat to the original operational objective (the oil fields) and negatively affected the overall theater campaign (wasting troops and time).

Barker states it best in his book, *The Bastard War*, "World War I was waged in a muddled fashion and—if only because it was so remote--the 'picnic' in Mesopotamia was probably the biggest muddle of all."²⁵

EFFORTS IN EGYPT: the third major southwest Asian operation.

Initially, British efforts in Egypt were centered on the Suez Canal (their single decisive point in the region). Following the defeat of Turkish forces in a direct attack on the Canal in late 1914, British efforts incrementally increased to the extent that, at the time that Gallipoli forces abandoned their beachhead and retreated, Britain was advancing towards Jerusalem. But it took almost two years to achieve victory over Turkish forces in this city (December 1917).

Following this offensive, and in an effort that required even more forces, General Allenby led a combined force of British and Arab forces to take Damascus, which fell in 1918. During this period, British forces had also defended against an attack on the Suez Canal from Libya in the west during 1915.

While limited in the level of effort (measured in terms of many battalions as compared to that on the western front which was measured in terms of hundreds of divisions), these offensive operations nevertheless required support. This support reduced that which could be applied to either the western front or to the efforts in the Dardanelles. Moreover, the forces

²⁵ A.J. Barker, *The Bastard War* (Dial Press, 1967), p. vii.

used in this area of operations were the same ones originally designated by the draft campaign plan for use in Gallipoli.

Although there were more tactical and operational successes associated with this operation than in the others, an evaluation of operational art elements yields numerous shortfalls:

Strategically,

- Failure of the British to incorporate this operation into any synchronized plan allowed local commanders to set operational objectives (Jerusalem and Damascus) that, like the conquest of Baghdad, had no bearing on the theater strategic objective.

- Pursuit of these questionable objectives had little impact on the war effort and could better be described simply as protection measures for a British decisive point (the Suez Canal). These forces should have been relocated to other fronts to increase the mass of attacks on enemy centers of gravity to directly affect the theater strategic objective.

Operationally,

- The costs were unacceptable—proceeding to Damascus was a waste of effort, providing no pressure on the theater decisive point (the Dardanelles) or theater operational objectives.

EFFORTS IN ARABIA: the fourth southwest Asian operation.

Perhaps one of the most important, yet under-emphasized, operations was that of the Arab revolt in Arabia. Britain, whose leaders saw an opportunity to raise an Arab revolt against Turkey, were able to achieve an economy of force by using existing forces in the region in the form of local Arab tribes. For a low cost (under twenty British personnel and relatively few weapons) British commanders in Egypt utilized Arabs to interdict Turkish forces threatening the Suez Canal.

The central figure in this effort was Lawrence of Arabia. Forming a cohesive force of Arabs, some from historically feuding tribes, Lawrence cut railroad lines and attacked outposts throughout the central Arabian region. These guerrilla efforts were well orchestrated

with efforts of regular British forces directed by General Allenby, whose stated objective was the capture of Damascus.

But a correct tactical utilization of these guerrilla forces should have allowed the British to divert trained British colonial forces in Egypt (Indians, New Zealanders, and Australians) to other regions to better affect Germany's center of gravity. Instead, the troops made available as a result of the Arab uprising were used for inconsequential advances on Jerusalem and Damascus.

From an operational art perspective, a summary of the operation includes:

Strategically,

- The Arabian revolt served the defense of the Suez Canal and the conquest of Damascus, not the conquest of Germany.

- The cost in terms of time, despite the local tactical successes, led to Britain's inability to impact the correct operational objective of threatening Germany from the south.

Operationally,

- the overall synchronization with Egyptian operations was superb in this Arab operation. Efforts were sequenced perfectly with regular British forces moving from their bases in Egypt, unity of command between the Egyptian-based British forces and Arabian forces could not have been better, and all of the efforts were focused on the local center of gravity—the Turkish outposts. The application of force was correct—risks and costs could not have been lower.

CAMPAIGN PLAN: a better application of operations in southwest Asia.

Previous sections have noted significant shortfalls in British operations in their southern theater. These sections have focused primarily on shortfalls at the strategic and operational levels, highlighting operational art elements that include synchronization and sequencing of major operations, utilization of time and forces, unity of effort and unity of command, and pursuit of proper objectives. Most if not all of the British shortfalls were caused by the lack of a theater campaign plan and a clearly identified strategic objective that leaders at all levels could use to maintain a unity of effort.

A properly formatted campaign plan for the southwest Asian theater would have included details applicable to each of the seven tenets listed at the beginning of this paper. Building on Lord Fisher's initial attempt, such a plan might have looked like this (brackets denote changes to Lord Fisher's plan):

[Following initiation of an Arab effort designed to prevent Turkish forces from reinforcing units stationed at the Dardanelles], all Indian [forces] and 75,000 of the British troops in France [are] to be embarked at Marseilles, [placed under the command of GEN XYZ who shall answer directly to the War Council,] and landed, together with the Egyptian garrison, on the [European side] of the Dardanelles; the Greeks [are to attack northward on the left flank following establishment of a southern front by the British after the fall of Constantinople]; the Bulgarians [are to establish the center portion of the southern front in Bulgaria and are to await the arrival of British forces. As soon as feasible, Russian forces are to achieve a breakthrough north of the Black Sea to take positions on the eastern flank. In coordination with the British landing at Gallipoli, and placed under the command of GEN XYZ,] a squadron of [all available] British and French battleships [are to bombard Turkish forts and positions at the mouth of the Dardanelles. Following British landings, these vessels are to move up the straits to provide artillery support to British land forces, prevent concentration of fire from the Asiatic side of the Dardanelles, and are to match the progress of British land forces. This combined force will then move on Constantinople with the intent to force its capitulation no later than April 1915. Once Turkish forces have capitulated on the European side of the straits, British forces are to attack northwards to meet Bulgarian forces, Greek forces, and Russian forces, who will be placed under command of GEN XYZ and will establish a southern front to threaten Germany. GEN XYZ shall establish local outposts manned by the least number of troops deemed necessary to protect the Suez Canal in Egypt and oil assets in Basra. These local outposts shall restrict operations to areas within fifty miles of these assets.]

As rewritten, and in comparison to the seven tenets of a campaign, this plan provides a broad concept of operations to achieve strategic military objectives and clearly defines success as being the opening of a southern front to threaten Germany. It provides an orderly schedule of strategic military decisions throughout the theater (restricting operations that negatively impact the primary operation), and orients on the enemy's center of gravity (the Turkish forces in the Dardanelles). It phases a series of related major operations designed to build on existing political constraints and sensitivities (Bulgaria and Greece are allowed to remain on familiar ground), and composes subordinate forces and command relationships (all forces are

placed under a theater commander). Finally, it provides operational direction and tasks to subordinates, and synchronizes land and sea efforts into a cohesive and synergistic whole.²⁶

There are, of course, variations of this plan that the War Council could have considered: the British could have conducted diversionary attacks in Egypt and Iraq in 1914, utilizing strong British forces to feint at Jerusalem, then have withdrawn south to draw Turkish forces away from their logistics bases. Once separated from their bases, British forces could have locked them in a feigned campaign of attrition in Arabia. While Arab forces harassed the Turkish rear, a token force of defenders could have held the ground east and west of the Suez Canal and in Basra. By mid-1915, British commanders could have moved the majority of their forces (along with the British fleet) to the Dardanelles for an attack there.

British planners of the southern front knew the importance of having a fully developed military plan. Lord Fisher's initial plan for Gallipoli, in fact, called for large numbers of army and naval forces to be focused on a theater decisive point held by enemy forces who were, as yet, not reinforced. There, these forces were to engage the Turkish forces utilizing a surprise attack upon numerous points in the Dardanelles. When the planned forces failed to materialize, British leaders failed to compensate by halting the operation and drafting a new plan. This omission signaled their failure to achieve success in the southwest Asian theater.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that instead of sequencing or synchronizing major operations to achieve their objectives, British leaders allowed (with the exception of the Arabian rebellion) each of

²⁶ Mendel and Banks, "Campaign Planning: Getting It Straight", Parameters, September 1988 (NWC 4118), p. 46.

the operations to proceed according to its own timeline. Instead of unity of command, each of the major operations of the campaign were orchestrated from the far removed British War Council in London or simply by local commanders who, without adequate direction, succeeded in risking more than London might have reasonably accepted. Instead of strategic direction, each had limited objectives with no concerted purpose. And, instead of an established operational tempo, each had little momentum save that achieved through limited tactical successes.

Only one of the major operations in this theater, the operation at Gallipoli, served national strategic objectives. The others were either too far removed or sought to achieve objectives that had little consequence on the correct strategic objective. To meet the strategic objective, Britain was obligated to apply rapid and continual pressure to open a front to threaten Germany. This made the capture of the Dardanelles the most critical task of the southwest Asian campaign, and the major operation for the conquest of Gallipoli was rightfully dedicated to its capture. Unfortunately, sequencing to bring overwhelming force together at the critical time against this point did not occur.

It is clear that British efforts in removed regions like Iraq, Egypt and Arabia did not directly threaten, or pressure, German forces in Europe. One could summarize British efforts in the southwest Asian campaign, then, as ineffective in that these efforts were direct approaches to tactical objectives, the success of which did not affect the theater strategic or operational objectives. While Britain was justified in defending her decisive points at the Suez Canal and Abadan, operational art principles required Britain to maintain immediate pressure (thus maximizing the available amount of time) on the theater operational objective of opening a southern front that threatened Germany. In short, British efforts in Egypt or Iraq would

only have been justified had Britain massed a preponderance of her forces in this region to effect a breakthrough in Arabia with the objective of capturing the Dardanelles and opening a southern front to threaten Germany no later than mid-1916.

Although it is easy to criticize from our perspective (hindsight being 20/20), debates on southwestern Asian strategy that occurred at the time were based on considerations just mentioned. Military lessons from Moltke, Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Napoleon, Jomini, and a host of other fine strategists were already in existence, and these were more than sufficient to influence British strategy and operational art in World War I. Many leaders in Britain were fully cognizant of these lessons, yet most of the lessons were disregarded. Perhaps a structured military education program (like those that exist today) or a different leadership structure might have made a difference. Suffice it to say that we will never know the true reasoning behind Britain's failed attempt to open a southern front, nor will we ever have a true answer for their failure to be influenced by historical lessons or other proven military principles. This will remain a great mystery of World War I.

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